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ABSTRACT

This digest focuses on the articulation of foreign language programs between secondary and higher education. The following questions are addressed: (1) What are urgent reasons for better program articulation?; (2) What forms does articulation take?; (3) What aspects of the educational process does articulation address?; (4) Are there examples of effective articulation between secondary and higher education?; and (5) What administrative and professional challenges lie ahead? (VWL)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics
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Foreign Language Program Articulation From High School to the University

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Although by no means a new issue, the articulation of foreign language programs has recently received particular attention. Broadly interpreted, articulation refers to the well motivated and well designed sequencing and coordination of instruction toward certain goals. Thus, the concept of articulation recognizes that educational programs must attain their goals in the most effective way given the educational setting within which students learn a certain subject.

What Are Urgent Reasons for Better Program Articulation?

The greater demand for better articulated foreign language programs is related to pervasive social, public policy, and professional considerations:

- the need for high levels of language competency in an increasingly competitive global marketplace;
- America's expanding involvement with speakers of major, yet traditionally less commonly taught languages (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Russian, Korean), whose rules of instruction are less developed and that are particularly difficult for native speakers of English;
- accountability in public education;
- diverse goals in language instruction that must be accommodated seamlessly;
- language instruction reaching a diversity of students for whom instruction must be optimized.

What Forms Does Articulation Take?

A well-designed curriculum is articulated along three axes: *vertical articulation* refers to the continuity of a program throughout the length of the program; *horizontal articulation* targets the coordination of any curriculum across the many or several classes that are simultaneously attempting to accomplish the same objectives; and *interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary articulation* address the capability of a second language as a school subject to associate with other disciplines in the curriculum (Lange, 1982).

Vertical articulation, the core of the issue, refers to how specific learning goals, however determined, can be attained. The first task is to assure that specific goals have been stated in ways that translate into realistic curricular and performance objectives. Horizontal articulation is primarily a matter of supervision and coordination within a given program. Finally, interdisciplinary articulation is the principal means of mainstreaming foreign languages into American public education, and accepting the instruction of these languages as a necessity rather than a luxury.

What Aspects of the Educational Process Does Articulation Address?

The articulation of foreign language programs between high schools and universities must consider the major perspectives of educational administration and practice at each of these distinct educational levels, and must ease the transition between these levels in order to achieve positive outcomes.

Goals. What are the goals of instruction in terms of performance objectives? One of the important outcomes of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' (ACTFL) work with proficiency testing has been a better understanding of realistic expectations regarding learners' functional language ability, particularly in the area of speaking (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 1986). The current interest in communicative language teaching, however, does not amount to an exclusionary focus on oral language. Both the short-term and the long-term goals of a well-articulated curriculum must seek a balance among all four modes of language use. Short-term goals must respect the fact that comprehension (reading and listening) precedes production (writing and speaking) and that there is no skills parity. Long-term goals must acknowledge that literacy, the ability to deal extensively with literate language, is, as in native language instruction, the ultimate goal of foreign language instruction.

Length of Study. Length of study may be the single most important factor in the ultimate attainment of language proficiency. This realization has led to multi-year language requirements at the secondary level and previous language instruction in elementary and middle schools. However, improved language capability is not guaranteed by learning language at an earlier age. It can only be obtained with uninterrupted, well-sequenced, long-term language instruction.

The Learners. Articulation is not merely an issue of length, or of adding new instructional materials to those traditionally taught. Program articulation requires rethinking the entire instructional sequence, in terms of the different learners engaged in language learning at various stages of educational and second language development. For the instructional levels in question, styles and strategies for learning are likely to shift from holistic, meaning-driven, uniquely situated ways of comprehending a language to analytical, function and form-connecting, differentiated approaches for comprehending and using language.

Syllabus and Curriculum Design. These shifts in learning strategies and learner styles must be reflected in curriculum and syllabus design. Overall language proficiency is not acquired

linearly, but in a cyclical fashion, with global, meaning-driven stages alternating and interacting with analytical, form-driven stages. Similarly, though speaking remains a valid curricular goal, it cannot receive primary emphasis. Evidence from educational and second language acquisition research, and the legitimate academic goals of universities, require an integration of all modes in a differentiated fashion right from the start (Swaffar et al., 1990).

Materials Development. Because materials are often the backbone of a curriculum, materials for the articulated curriculum should reflect insights from second language acquisition research, as well as the need for longer instructional sequences. In that regard, change is particularly called for at the postsecondary level where sequentially arranged materials are rare.

Outcomes Assessment. Articulation is inherently tied to assessing the attainment of goals, in summative testing as well as at different stages of the curriculum. Such assessment will reflect a delicate balance between national norms and valid local considerations. In any case, though testing is likely to continue as group testing using standardized tests, tests must reflect the new functional goals in all modes of language use (e.g., previous knowledge vs. no previous knowledge for reading and listening comprehension tasks), and the insights from adaptive testing using computers that calibrate learners' abilities as they perform language tasks.

Are There Examples of Effective Articulation between Secondary and Higher Education?

South Carolina presents a grass-roots model of curriculum articulation that arose under the pressure and challenge of newly imposed admissions requirements to state-supported colleges and universities (Mosher, 1989). In 1985, state college admission requirements in South Carolina were revised to include two years of foreign language study at the secondary level. In response to the new requirement, the South Carolina Council on Foreign Language Placement and Curriculum (SCCFLPAC) was organized to coordinate secondary and postsecondary efforts to address the requirement, and to provide a means for cooperation and discussion among secondary and postsecondary foreign language departments and teachers. The council set the following goals: 1) the establishment of a bilateral statement of recommended measurable student outcomes for each of four years of foreign language instruction at the secondary level; 2) the establishment of a rationale for a continuous foreign language program in secondary schools through a minimum of four years of study; 3) the preparation of groundwork toward the establishment of a common format for placement procedures at secondary institutions; 4) and the establishment of a mechanism for communication with high schools concerning the fulfillment of expectations.

Despite certain limitations (financial, lack of interest by some institutions), great progress has been made in providing a means of communication between secondary and postsecondary teachers. The sharing of ideas and plans, and the willingness to allow constructive criticism by other colleagues has lead to the transplanting and adapting of ideas (Mosher, 1989).

What Administrative and Professional Challenges Lie Ahead?

Class Size and Tracking. Among the biggest challenges for an articulated curriculum is the need for separate tracks and for less rigid standards for class size. As learners enter foreign language instruction at different stages and, consequently, attain different levels of language proficiency, high schools and

universities will have to establish different tracks. Otherwise, the gains to be obtained from extended sequences cannot be realized. The frequent practice of placing students with extensive previous instruction into beginners' classes is not only educationally unsound, it is also fiscally irresponsible. It is the fiscal connection of not providing tracked sequences that should be raised vigorously when smaller classes are denied because of alleged fiscal responsibility toward an educational program.

Even without tracking, upper levels of instruction are likely to attract fewer students. Therefore, the justifications for minimum enrollment must be altered in light of the expanded sequence of instruction: Articulation necessitates overarching considerations rather than isolated solutions.

Assessment. Articulated instruction is directly tied to assessment. The most noticeable discontinuity has traditionally occurred between secondary and post-secondary levels. Whether implemented as summative testing at the end of secondary foreign language instruction, which is likely to be the more manageable solution, or as mandatory placement testing at the point of entry into post-secondary schooling, assessment is crucial for an articulated curriculum that seeks instructional gains. Extensive professional discussion involving all levels of instruction, and leading to broad consensus on learning outcomes and their most appropriate assessment, remains to be accomplished, although noteworthy efforts are beginning to appear (Mosher, 1989). Ultimately, new national tests should be devised.

Teacher Training and Staffing. With longer instructional sequences, teacher training and staffing decisions become more differentiated, in terms of pedagogical expertise as well as language proficiency standards. The need for foreign language educators with different kinds of certification inherently points to restructured undergraduate and graduate programs in colleges and universities.

Collaboration. Program articulation acknowledges that high school graduates continue their education in their home states as well as elsewhere. Collaboration and cooperation are most likely to be achieved within a state educational system. Such efforts can provide important examples for solutions. In addition, national professional organizations must work at the general framework within which articulated curricula are to be implemented, for the sake of students who attend colleges outside their home state and, more importantly, for the sake of an American society that counts competency in a foreign language as part of any general education.

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